

The following blog entry was written by Congressman Pence yesterday after he participated in the sendoff for the 76th Infantry Brigade of the Indiana National Guard. Click [here](#) for photos of the event from the

Indy Star

. WISH TV has video coverage of the entire ceremony

[here](#)

Along with Senator Lugar and most of my colleagues in Congress, I was privileged to share a few thoughts to the 3,400 members the 76th Infantry Brigade of the Indiana National Guard and their 15,000 family members gathered at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis today.

It was an emotional and humbling day. The sights of this day will live with me forever. Row upon row of uniformed men and women filled the floor of the RCA Dome. The stands were filled with moms and dads, wives and husbands, children and siblings all hoping for one last look, one last wave before the 400-day deployment would begin.

The so-called dignitaries on the grandstand all made remarks to the best of our ability but I observed:

"I couldn't help but be struck by how incongruous it is that I should be speaking to you. Our roles today are backwards. It is I and all of us on this stage who should be sitting in your seats, and you before the microphone. It is one thing to speak of courage; it is quite another to be courageous.

"Whatever ability to inspire may exist in us is but faint reflection of what already abounds in you.

"The fact is, it is YOU who inspire ME. It is you who bring me courage. It is you who teach me-and the entire nation-about bravery, sacrifice, commitment, and honor. What it means to be an American. And like all great teachers, you teach not through words, but by example. You go knowing what it means.

"With hearts aching to hug your own children, you bear your longing so that others may hug their children.

"In bearing loneliness for a time, you spare untold millions from permanent sorrow.

"In postponing your lives for a time, you give millions the freedom to pursue theirs.

"In bearing temporary hardship and fatigue, you prevent countless and unknowable horrors.

"And because you have seized your own fear by the throat and wrestled it into submission, you have wrested the heel of oppression off millions of innocent men, women and children and opened their hearts and minds to democracy."

I assured them that this was "a moment of great significance in the life of this state and in the outcome of Operation Iraqi Freedom." Despite the pessimism of many in the national debate, I also assured the soldiers and their families that they were entering a "widening American success in Iraq," and that "now more than ever the professionalism of the Hoosier soldier is needed to turn the tide for freedom.

In the end, it was the sacrifices being made by the soldiers and their families that moved me the most. It was especially emotional when a video tribute played on the big screens, and those of us on the podium had to turn and face most of the crowd in the stands to see it.

As the families looked to the screens behind us, I looked at the families. I saw a young mother holding a boy in her arms who was just a bit too big to be held so he could wave his little flag just a little higher in the air.

I saw three teenage girls with tears rolling down their cheeks who all leaned into each other for support.

And I saw one family after another holding signs up with the name of a soldier straining through the crowd of thousands to catch one more glimpse of that precious face.

I felt very self-conscious about being there. I felt that I was intruding on a private family moment-for 3,400 families-but private nonetheless. But I know my constituents would have had me nowhere else in the world at that moment.

After the event, I was invited to mill around the floor where the soldiers were mustering before heading out to the buses. I spoke with commanding officers and rank and file soldiers.

In all their faces was the same look: seriousness, sadness and determination. A young specialist approached me to thank me for being there and I asked, "Where are you from son?" To which Michael Reno replied, "Muncie, sir."

As I responded with enthusiasm in being greeted by a constituent, he told me of his new wife and baby boy, how he would miss his son's first birthday and his first anniversary.

He then said, "But I've got a picture of them on my dog tags, sir." I said, "Show me!" He pulled out his tags, the back of which bears a taped color photo of his beautiful young family. I gave him a word of encouragement and promised Michael Reno that he, his wife and his boy would be in my prayers until he came home. He nodded in a shy way and said, "Thank you, sir, I'd really appreciate that."

As I finish this entry, I am filled with the emotions of the day. With pride, sadness and a renewed determination to see that their sacrifice and the sacrifice of all who have gone before shall not be in vain. God bless the 76th.

Mike Pence
RCA Dome, Indianapolis